

Jenna Lefkowitz

### **Cuba Final Project**

I've been to a lot of places, met a lot of people, and even gone on many community service trips prior to going to Cuba. But I can honestly say I've never had an experience like I had in Cuba. For one thing, I had never been to a Communist country. I never fully understood what it was like for a country's government to basically control every aspect of the people's lives there. On the trip, we got to know many members of the Jewish community in Cuba including kids, teens, adults, and elders. Every time I spoke to one of them, a common phrase they would use would be, "The government gives us this" or "The government doesn't allow this." It's difficult to compare my life to theirs in that I don't even think about my country's government preventing me from doing or attaining ordinary things such as the kinds and amounts of food I buy, where I can live, what occupation I can have, or even where I can travel. While our supermarkets are stocked with every type of food and appliance you can think of, the supermarkets in Cuba have almost nothing in them; some aisles are completely empty while others just have Saltine crackers and bottles of water. On a more Jewish note, Jews in Cuba aren't even able to observe certain Jewish practices such as keeping kosher because the government does not provide enough kosher food and it's very expensive. Personally, I don't really like categorizing myself as a certain kind of Jew whether it's Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform. I take different aspects of each and decide what I'd like to practice. One thing I do take pride in is my persistence to keep kosher (in the house); in my house, I have separate dishes and utensils and only cook kosher meat. As a Jew, keeping kosher is a significant tradition which keeps me connected to my faith in my everyday life, and I can't imagine not even having the option to practice it. Another aspect of Cuba that shocked me was when I learned that each